

Interview of Ralph Fuller by Richard Killblane at Ft Eustis, VA, June 19, 2004

Q This is the interview of Ralph Fuller by Richard Killblane, 19 June 2004.

Could you start out by telling me how you ended up in the transportation corps in Vietnam, what unit, and when?

A Okay. I had orders to Vietnam to the Airborne Ranger, Vietnam. I completed Ranger School, went on assignment to Vietnam, at the 25th Infantry Division as a combat infantry platoon leader. I spent time approximately three or four months with the 25th and then its colors went back to the United States. The infantry officers in the 25th were sent to fill in the slots of the transportation because it sounded like at the time that there was more firepower being controlled by E5s and below in the transportation units. So they took the infantry officers and I went into the 523rd Transportation Company at Qui Nhon Support Command. At the same time I went in, there were one, two, three, at least four other infantry officers assigned to the transportations.

CPT Don Voightritter was the commanding officer of the 523rd and I believe there was one other TC[Transportation] officer there at the time.

Q Who was the battalion commander, and what battalion was it?

A I've got a blank here.

A Okay, [LTC Alvin] Ellis was the [39th Transportation] Battalion commander, Alvin, I believe was his first name. "Big Al and his moneymakers" was what they referred to the light cargo trucks. At the time, we stayed in Qui Nhon, primarily running convoys between Qui Nhon and Pleiku.

The first ambush I was involved in was when I was riding on a gun truck called King Kong. It was one of the APC [Armored Personnel Carrier] model gun trucks and we ran [out of] Qui Nhon and then Lam Son 719 began. Voightritter stayed at Qui Nhon and closed down, and I took the company up north at that time. I had no clue what I was doing.

We took the NCOs [Non Commissioned Officers] aside and I told them I didn't know what I was doing. I told the truck master that whatever he said went, and then told the troops the same thing, and for some reason they appreciated that. You

know, they supported me in everything I did from that point on. They also found out that I had already had 15 years in the military and I was older than the company commander, even though I was only a first lieutenant.

We went north. Voightritter caught up with us with the 1SG [First Sergeant].

Q Could you back up. What month and year did you arrive in Vietnam?

A It was June 1970 when I arrived in Vietnam and I was assigned to the Qui Nhon support unit around September.

Q And that first ambush, do you remember when that was?

A The first time I took a convoy up would've been in September.

A I don't remember, I think King Kong's NCOIC [Non Commissioned Officer in charge] was a guy by the name of SGT [Sergeant] Maguire.

Q What happened in that ambush?

A There was several trucks in front of us. There was a tanker, but there was a hairpin curve, so the tanker slowed down and received an RPG. After that he kind of blocked the roadway.

Q This is at An Khe Pass or Mang Giang Pass?

A Mang Giang Pass.

A Then we worked our way forward using suppressive fire and picked up drivers as we went.

Q So only one vehicle was damaged?

A Yep. And it blocked everybody in the kill zone.

Q Was it on fire?

A No.

Q How far back were you guys from that?

A At that time, we were probably 15 trucks back from that vehicle.

Q Then you went up basically doing what?

A Worked our way forward, and we were suppressive fire. It just made the troops feel good because at the time we were receiving fire, because they [enemy] were shooting down at us.

Q They were up on the high ground?

A Yeah, oh yeah, we had high ground to the right, left, and front. It was dropped off from the left.

Q Were you coming back or to Pleiku?

A We were going up to. We were on the way up --

Q To Pleiku.

A -- so we were going real slow.

Q Pleiku. About what size NVA [North Vietnamese Army] force?

A I don't think it was NVA because they didn't stay around long enough. They didn't put up much of a resistance. Once we put out the suppressive fire, that pretty much ended it. Then we cleared the vehicle and got the rest of the convoy out.

A As the convoys were going to and from, we'd usually receive sniper fire from high ground. We left Qui Nhon and went north on the Lam Son, then we went up to Fire Support Base Vandergrift.

Q You made Vandergrift in one day?

A Nope. I'm trying to remember where we left from. We went up some, like Phu Bai.

Q Where was your first stop after you left Qui Nhon?

A I had refueling trucks with me and we pretty much went straight up. I don't remember RON [resting over night] anywhere. At that time, it seemed like we'd have had too at that distance, but I don't remember it now.

Q You mentioned Vandergrift so --

A Yeah. Fire Support Base Vandergrift was open, but what they were doing was just reopening Khe Sanh in support of Lam Son 719.

Q So did you stop there?

A Yes. That was actually where we, the 523rd [Transportation Unit], were assigned to, and it was down in the valley. We were completely surrounded on three sides by higher ground. The engineers had just reopened the road between Vandergrift and Khe Sanh. We took, as I recall, the first convoys to Khe Sanh, and the roads weren't all that good at that time. They weren't cleared on either side. A lot of the road was windy with hairpin curves and steep inclines.

As we went up there, the engineers actually had places that were off the

roadway. That was their compound. The engineers compounds were on the road going between Vandergrift and Khe Sanh. Between Vandergrift and Khe Sanh was always a one-day convoy. Their checkpoints had artillery support at the time, so could call for fire. I don't remember the names of the checkpoints. We got up to Khe Sanh, and all I remember was thick dust, and there were no buildings. There was tall grass and trees. The trees that were there, were barren of any foliage and full of parachutes from flares hanging on these trees. It was just an eerie situation. I'd never been to a place like that before.

We went up and offloaded on the areas that had perforated steel plating. We just took the cargo there, and then we remained there --

Q At Khe Sanh?

A At Khe Sanh.

A I remember the air strip there because the first time we were there, there was a C130 that came in and they were re-supplying by air.

Q Now, walk me through this, so you're dropping off cargo at the airstrip at Khe Sanh, and the C130s are picking it up and taking it in?

A No. The C130s are also re-supplying to Khe Sanh.

Q They're bringing?

A They're bringing supplies

Q So who's at Khe Sanh?

A I don't know who was up there.

A I have no clue. I know we'd taken artillery ammunition in support of them, and then from then all we did were daily runs between Khe Sanh and Vandergrift. That was our primary mission, and this continued with a lot of ambushes. Like at the Rock Pile between Fire Support Base and Vandergrift. It seemed like any time we went there, we were always getting hit.

Q What was the contact like?

A Usually light. I remember one incident I was on Uncle Meat, and we were receiving fire. They [enemy] got the left front tire [with an RPG]. It went flat, and I was at the rear of the convoy at the time. I radioed ahead to continue on, and informed whoever was in the convoy to go ahead and take charge. While we sat there, we had an

open field to our right and an embankment to our left and as we were going up [to Vandergrift] I remember Rose would've been the driver but he was out and one of the other crew members was helping him change the tire. We were manning the guns, me and the other crew members. As he said something to me and I lifted my helmet and a B-40 rocket went over me, struck the hillside, and everybody got down naturally. I got a small piece of shrapnel in the back of my head, I'm talking small, and the crew member said, "Oh, hey, sir, you get a slow reaction badge now." I says, "No way, and don't tell anybody about it." But I didn't go there and get a slow reaction badge.

Q Now what's a slow reaction badge?

A A Purple Heart.

A So, we started receiving contact and a FAC [Forward Air Controller] was overhead. He came on station and said, "Do you need anything down there." And I said, "Yeah. We'd like a little support." I said, "What you got?" He said, "I've got the world up here. I've got all kinds of radios." He says, "What would you like?" And I said, "Well, I'd like to light up this tree line over here because we're receiving fire from it." So I popped a smoke, gave him grid coordinates, and he said, "Would you like a little napalm?" And I said, "I would just love it." He came in with a napalm strike from some Air Force jets, and it was [the end of the] enemy opposition. We got the tire changed and then caught up with the convoy.

Q What time of day was this ambush?

A This would've been mid-day.

Q Mid-day? So, oh, when you said, "light up the tree line" you were talking about with fire?

A Yeah. With napalm.

Q Not flares?

A No.

Q Okay. You gave it with napalm.

A I'm sorry. Yeah.

Q How come you liked riding on gun trucks?

A Because people that road in jeeps got their butts shot off and I just like the crews. [Uncle] Meat, and Eve of Destruction were both in my platoon. The Daughter of

Darkness, which was a three-quarter[ton] gun truck, was actually my personal gun truck but I'd rather be with the troops. Meat and the Eve of Destruction were considered sister trucks, and the crews were really close together. They stuck together. I remember that when we went some place together, I could park Meat and Eve nose-to-nose. I would put a hammock that I carried from my infantry days between the bumpers on the two trucks, and I think I'm the only one that did that. Otherwise, we slept on cots or we used stretchers across the plating on the truck. I know we got rained on, but I can't remember what we did when it rained other than get wet because we never covered the gun trucks.

I've seen pictures of Ace of Spades in a situation where they had a cover. I think we probably had a cover, but didn't use it. It felt better where we could see out. I didn't like the idea of not being able to see 360 [degrees]. One of the incidents toward the end of Lam Son, I think it was the big push. They said that we'd be going farther north from Khe Sanh, and we actually got kicked out of Khe Sanh. It was a night run, and the idea was that we had to be where we were going with the artillery shells and ammunition by 0600. The troops and the artillery guys were going to shoot off everything they had and if we didn't get there, they would be in a defenseless position.

We took off and as I recall, there were two right turns, and I had a drivers' meeting, and I told him, okay. I told him how important it was and everybody understood, and it was really quiet. It was one of the quietest meetings I ever had with all the drivers. The lead truck was a cargo truck, that had a PRC25 radio, and what I was trying to do was get 10 cargo trucks and gun trucks to make the two right turns. So we take off and it's dark, and we're running with lights.

Q Now, how many trucks total?

A Probably somewhere between 50 and 100.

Q Okay. And you're the convoy commander?

A I'm the convoy commander and I was running from the back.

Q In what vehicle?

A As I recall, I was on the Eve of Destruction.

We take off and we'd been on the road a couple of hours, and one of the gun trucks called back and said, "Hey, 26." I was the 2nd Platoon Leader, 6 was a commander, so they called me 26 on the radio. "Be advised, I think the cargo truck

behind me took a left when we came to the juncture.” So I say, “Thank you very much.”

We started going up, and sure enough, we get to this intersection and we’re following trucks to the left in the dark. We kicked it up, and as we came by a cargo truck, we told them to turn around, go back to the intersection and make a left to catch up with the convoy. We continued this until the trucks were stopped, and as we were going by we told them to turn around any way they could and help each other. It’s a dirt road, naturally, and then we came up to a bridge. One of the cargo trucks had gotten over the bridge and was starting up a steep incline up and to the right.

Q Now let me back up. So as you’re going forward to find that lead truck, you’re telling everybody else to stop and turn around?

A Yep. And stop, turn around, and when they get to the intersection, take a left, and catch up to the convoy. I told the other gun truck, Meat and whoever else was listening, to be looking for them.

So we get up there and a cargo truck had finally got him stopped. He was going to try to back it down in the dark, turning and going over a bridge at the same time, and he didn’t make it. Part of the truck went off the left side of the bridge, as I recall and the driver bailed out. He was okay, so we put him on another cargo truck. We had everybody turn around, go back up to the intersection and turn left. We ended up making it just about the time that it was starting to get light.

All the trucks were stopped when I got there, I looked around and I couldn’t see anything. The artillery opened up, and they continued firing until they exhausted the ammunition they had, and we were there as their replacement.

We offloaded, turned around to go out. Meat was the lead gun truck leaving this area. As the convoy started off, I’m in the rear again. I heard an explosion, and Meat had run over a landmine. It was a small landmine and it blew the left two rear wheels on the truck. At the time there were five people standing up in the back of Meat, and none of them were injured seriously. There might’ve been some scrapes or bruises.

Rose, the driver of Meat at the time, assessed the situation, and the axle was down in the dirt. I didn’t see how they could possibly drive the Meat, so I said, “Take the guns, and ammunition and everything off, and we were going to leave.” At the time, they said, “Give us a minute, sir.” The guys took a chain, and tied the axle up to the

frame, and said we can make it. And I said, "If that's all it takes."

While they were working on it, I went around and from Ranger training, discovered sandal tracks by the tire tread of one individual, who had come down and laid the mine, and gone back the same way. So I knew he wasn't NVA. He wouldn't have gone back the same way, and I don't think he would've been wearing the sandal.

They got the vehicle repaired, and went back to Khe Sanh, and I believe we went in and took Meat on down to Vandergrift. If I'm not mistaken, we got another truck, a newer vehicle, and put the Meat box on that vehicle because I don't remember repairing that when they ran over the mine.

Q What time did you leave on this convoy? Was it daylight or what?

A When we left and the (inaudible)?

Q When you got the order to leave Khe Sanh to go up to the fire base. You had to be there by six.

A Six in the morning.

Q Right. When did you leave?

A It seems like it was like 10:00 at night, or somewhere in there. It was dark. In the middle of the dark.

Q Was this inside Laos?

A No. The truck that I lost at the bridge was, but I didn't have the map. It ran off my map and my map ended in South Vietnam.

Q So this trip was not into Laos itself?

A No. There was talk later that this artillery battery would have been a couple of a hundred meters inside South Vietnam and not in Laos. It was in support. I remembered coming back in the daylight and seeing all these hulks of tanks from a prior. I believe probably when the Marines were there, and they had that invasion of the armor from the north.

Q Oh, the hulks of the tanks were enemy tanks?

A Yes. Enemy tanks, that we didn't see that night going up. There were probably a couple hundred of them, vehicles, tanks, and I can't think of anything else.

Q Is that the only time you went forward from Khe Sanh?

A Yes. All the rest of the running was between Khe Sanh and Vandergrift.

They were just everyday runs.

Q Were you getting ambushed every day?

A Pretty much receiving fire, not full-fledged. Things like, when Proud American got hit, LT [Tom] Callahan had come down from Khe Sanh to Fire Support Base Vandergrift. I remember he told the battalion commander, [Alvin] Ellis, that they had received fire and he thought that it was an unsafe time to take another convoy up there. Plus, it was going to be dark by the time they got up there.

Q This is up where?

A Back up to Khe Sanh. So anyway, he kicked off another convoy going up with Proud American on it. LT [Jim] Baird was the convoy commander. CPT Voightritter was on his vehicle, Proud American, and a Spec-4 Robert Thorne was the driver. When they kicked out, they had all the gun trucks that were not in the convoy or at Khe Sanh line up at Vandergrift, and we monitored the radio. Anytime a convoy would go out, I wanted the convoy monitored and the gun trucks on stand-by just in case.

The convoy was ambushed. A B-40 rocket went into Proud American on Thorne's side, between the cab and the box. LT Baird was sitting on or near the radio just behind the driver and when he got hit with the B-40. Baird swears that he saw the NVA stand up and let go with the B-40.

Q Who got hit?

A Baird got hit on the left side. He lost his left arm, and received multiple wounds to his left side. He survived this, and his hearing's bad today as part of that. He has the (inaudible).

Thorne, as he was dying, he had a choice between going into the hillside or off an embankment down into a creek. He took the hillside and saved the members of whoever was on the truck at the time.

We heard the contact and ran up there. I remember the engineers coming out. I was on the Daughter of Darkness at that time, and he was yelling, "Don't go up there! They're having an ambush! They're having an ambush!" I said, "That's what we're going up there for."

So we ran on up, probably had half a dozen gun trucks at the time, drove in, assessed the situation, and suppressive fire again. Everything settled down and I saw

Baird was injured badly. He said Thorne was dead. LT Callahan took Baird and laid him on a stretcher on the Black Widow, the NCOIC was SGT Willie Strong. I got on the horn and called in a Medevac. I started looking around for an area for the chopper to come in, because of the hillside. I was afraid the prop would be too wide to land him on the road. I went up a slight hill and came to a bridge that had a wider opening, and I figured that was the only place I could get a helicopter in.

About that time, the helicopter came on the station and said he was coming down, and to pop smoke. So I popped smoke, he identified the smoke. He started coming down and got on the radio and told him to bring Baird up. They brought him up to the helicopter hovering just above the bridge. Either he was afraid or I was afraid that the bridge may not support him, even though trucks had been going across right there.

They lifted Baird and someone else up into the helicopter at the same time. The helicopter took off, and I told the helicopter pilot, "Take care of him." I put that smoke grenade pin on my thumb. Later on I put it in my Booney hat, and I've still got it to this day. I offered it to Baird, and he said, "Hang it on your (inaudible) because that's where it belongs."

Getting back to the story, we put Thorne on Black Widow and Black Widow took Thorne down to Fire Support Base Vandergrift.

Then, where the Proud American was ambushed, the Ace of Spades, within two weeks, went over the side there. Hunter was the driver of the Ace and was killed.

Q That was two weeks later?

A I believe it was. In that time frame anyway. The Ace was upside down in that water I was talking about, or partially in, partially out. I believe the Meat crew was told to recover the weapons. They scrambled down and got what they could, and a lot of things were still left on the Ace. The Ace then was rebuilt from Proud American.

Q All right, now, so the Ace went over. Hunter, what was his job?

A He was the driver.

Q The driver?

A Yeah.

Q And so it went over into the stream --

A Yeah.

Q Okay. And, now, did you recover the box, too? Did you recover the whole vehicle?

A No. It was pretty much an impossible situation at the time. We didn't have recovery vehicles available to us that could get down that far and lift it, so it was left there. You can see where it's over the embankment looking down. This picture is available on the Vietnam gun truck site.

A It's not one of my pictures.

Q Any of the other crew injured on that?

A I don't remember.

A A lot of times I didn't want to know, and we were working 16 to 18 hour days, and I don't even remember who all was on that truck.

Q How long were you up there Lam Son 719?

A One point on Thorne's death, by the time Thorne was killed, this would've been March the 12th of '71. On The 13th of March, I had orders to go back to R&R for a two-week leave. Thorne was from Denver and I was, too. The next day, I actually flew down to Da Nang, went out, and flew back to the States. I flew into Denver, met my wife, and I said that I had to go see Thorne's parents.

I was in civilian clothes, went and knocked on the door, and Thorne's mom answered it. I says, "I'm LT Fuller from the 523rd." She looked at me and said, "Oh, wait a minute. Let me go get my husband. Please come in and sit down."

My wife stayed out in the car. I don't know where her husband was, out in the yard or whatever. She brought him in, set me down at the kitchen table, and then I told them how their son died. When I knocked on the door, I didn't know at that time whether they already knew that he was dead or not. I assumed that they did and in fact, they did know that their son had already died. But they thanked me profusely for letting them know what happened. I told them he was put in for the Bronze Star.

Q Do you know if he got it?

A I don't know.

A Didn't follow up on anything.

Q Now how long did Lam Son 719 last?

A Let's see it would've been March. It probably went through April. I'm not sure on times there. We left, after Lam Son, went down to Phu Bai, and moved into an engineer compound.

I went into the latrine and I remember hearing the toilets flushing. There were all kinds of toilets in there and sinks. Things we weren't used to, and the troops just wanted to hear a toilet flush. They just thought that was the neatest thing.

This was a really nice compound that the engineers had. They had a stage built back there and later on we had stage shows. The Korean dancers and singers would come and they'd put on shows for the troops. Our compound was adjacent to the MP compound there, and there was a gate between the two. We had a mess hall, and the MPs would come over and use our mess hall. We fed everybody there.

Q Oh, one other question: was there any other companies besides yours involved in this Lam Son 719?

A Oh, I'm sure there was.

A There were days I can remember coming down from Vandergrift and watching trucks going up to Khe Sanh all day long. It wasn't just our trucks. We were required, if I recall, 250 trucks a day at V-American. There were also the convoys at the South Vietnamese going up there. I remember we got a request one time for an escort for an American convoy, and so we said, "Okay." The convoy came up and stopped, and the lead vehicle was an APC with an agent on it if I recall. I was standing there in a Booney hat, an M-3 submachine gun with two magazines, and fatigues, and he was asking about an escort and I told him I was it. He says, "No. We wanted an escort with gun trucks." I said, "I don't have any to give you."

I got on the APC and they buttoned down, and we went on up. They were some scared troops; I guess they'd heard about Khe Sanh, too. The major was giving what he thought were locations, and I knew they were wrong. I asked if I could use their radio and I used my checkpoints, so my people would know where we were. It worked out because we'd been running it every day. That's it. Funny, funny world we're in.

Q So what happened after Lam Son?

A We went back to Phu Bai, and we'd receive sniper fire every now and then. In single trucks, we weren't receiving your major ambushes. We were having trouble with maintenance, keeping up the vehicles, and like every now and then, we'd get an artillery round. It would come in near us, and I would claim that they raided our trucks that we were cannibalizing, just to make the other ones and oop. They got it, so we could write that one off. Or otherwise we'd have to prepare the trucks and all the tires and everything on it, so they could take it back. I think to the Philippines where they would recondition the trucks.

Q That's right. It has to be 100% right?

A Yep.

Q All the parts back on it?

A Yep.

Q Well, what were the condition of your trucks during this timeframe?

A When we got up to go to begin the Lam Son, Voightritter was an outstanding officer. He had the lowest deadline rate in Vietnam. At the time, he had a (inaudible) out of Qui Nhon. Part of that was because the warrant officer that we had that knew how to stage vehicles and play the game. He would pull a motor in a vehicle during the night, and all you had to do was stage in the morning. What he would do is before daylight, he'd push the truck down and line it up. So he had all these vehicles lined up, and as a convoy commander, I'd go and have to check each vehicle. I checked for tight lug nuts, wheels, condition of tires, check the dash tint of the driver to make sure he's maintaining, the oil, I'd spot-check oil levels, make sure they weren't overfilled. When we took out, the warrant officer would just push the truck back and keep working on it. As long as it was staged, it was counted as being. So he knew that's how he knew we had the lowest deadline rate, when actually, it was just a numbers game. You know, just like a body count numbers game.

Q Got it. What were your destinations out of Phu Bai?

A I don't even remember now.

A I remember going over to the (inaudible) and having the change radio push. That was about it.

A We had a good maintenance program on the vehicles, especially when we

got back. The 523rd had a sign-up over at the maintenance that said "523rd Speed Shop", and the TC colors were red and gold. There were just some outstanding individuals.

A At one time, I had 14 people trying to keep up the tire changes. I remember one time, we were at Phu Bai going back, and I heard this explosion in the rear. Nothing happened and we all appeared to be all right. We pulled in one of the trucks and all four tires were flat because we had gone across the bridge that was controlled by South Vietnamese. They had taken a 90[mm] with a flachette round. Remember the little arrows? Blew out all four tires crossing it there. We weren't really well liked.

Q Not a happy family, huh? So how long did you stay at Phu Bai?

A I stayed in Phu Bai until June of 1971, and I left Phu Bai at the same time Eve of Destruction left. Eve of Destruction's last day on the road, I believe, was 8 June 1971. It was pulled off because Voightritter had written a letter requesting it be sent to transportation unit.

Q Why did he pick the Eve?

A Because it seemed like the Eve configuration was the one that set the standard for gun trucks that we knew about. It was the double roll armor with sand bags between. They'd tried the armor where they'd put it inside the bed side rails, and then they padded outside the single-walled armor. Some of it was single-walled armor on the outside with corrugated metal on the inside. Then it had the gun ports that were already cut into the side.

Q But no one used gun ports.

A And no one ever used gun ports.

A I think the Ace of Spades' gun ports were put in upside down. Nobody really realized it at first and nobody really cared.

We were talking the other day about getting on and off the gun trucks. Most of the time, I just went off or on the back of the vehicle, rather than going through the cab. It depends on the configuration of the gun truck.

The Eve has a cross-member that goes behind the driver and it's difficult to get in and out through that hole. If you're a big man, you're not going to be able to do it.

Q No. Okay. Anything else interesting about that timeframe?

A Not that I can think of.

Q What was the doctrine for unemployed gun trucks in the convoy? How would you normally organize a convoy? You mentioned one.

A Right.

Q A 10 to 1 ratio?

A Yep. 10 to 1. 10 cargo trucks to 1 gun truck. There would be times where it would be 25 to 1. You might only have two gun trucks to '70, but that didn't happen all the time. It just depended on what was going on at the time. During Lam Son, we really employed the gun trucks the most. We went back to Phu Bai and everything kind of got quiet. We weren't attacked like we were up there, so things got a little lax that way.

Q Okay. You mentioned about the OR [operational readiness] rate, but I was asking you about the condition of your trucks. You know, were they missing parts?

A By the time we pulled out of Lam Son we were missing all kinds of parts, we were cannibalized to maintain. When we got back to Phu Bai, I took my PLL clerk and I says, "What ever you want, you get." That was my parts clerk and he had his own van, and if he said it, we'd get it. If we had to scrounge it, steal it, it didn't make any difference. They were pretty good at both scrounging and stealing.

Q How long did you stay in the Army after that?

A I left Vietnam unassigned, called infantry branch. They asked what me what I wanted to do, and I said I wanted to go back to training rangers at Fort Benning. They said they had an opening for the Army shooting team as an operations officer, and I went there and stayed four years. I finished a little over twenty, and retired in '75.

Q So coming from an infantry background, having commanded a truck platoon, how did that rank as far as your assignments?

A I just really can't say. I don't know. I'm not able explain it because it was a greater challenge than I ever expected it to be. In the infantry, I was quiet, sneaky Pete and never talked. When you stopped nobody ever had to say anything, when you stopped everybody spaced out and all that.

I remember receiving a sniper fire, and I pulled back and call in an air

strike. That was the way I saw the infantry. In the Truck Company, they know you're coming. You can't hide that many trucks with that much noise and smoke.

Q What's the difference between truck drivers and infantrymen?

A Most of the ones we had were really serious about their equipment, they maintained it and were proud of it. There was a larger camaraderie in the transportation corps because they could come back at night and talk about it.

In the infantry, we would be out for several weeks and we didn't say anything, we didn't talk, and so you didn't get to know each other. I knew my squad leaders and my RTO, who was always the smartest guy in the platoon. If I got shot, he had to give the call for fire or Medevacs. But, I just have a high regard for each of them. I'm not saying we didn't have the dopers. I didn't understand why kids alongside the road would be holding up packs of Salem cigarettes, but then the crew on the gun truck knew Salem was more or less an unwritten signal that they had dope. They'd get their marijuana from that individual because nobody smoked Salems.

Q Okay. That's pretty much what I have.

A Okay doke.

Q Thank you.